



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 24 January to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about Breed Specific Legislation. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

We recognise that some people are opposed to the prohibitions placed on the four types of dog under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. However, the Government must balance the views of those who want to repeal or amend breed specific legislation with our responsibility to ensure that the public is properly protected from dog attacks.

Simply repealing the breed specific provisions contained in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 with no other changes may increase the risks to public safety, which the Government is unwilling to do. Any changes to current legislation would require careful consideration to ensure that public safety remains at the heart of the regime.

We share your constituents' high regard for animal welfare, including the welfare of seized dogs. I hope it will provide reassurance to know that there is an interim exemption scheme allowing dogs of prohibited type to remain with their owners in advance of a court hearing if the police determine that the dog is not likely to pose a threat to public safety in the meantime.

The Dangerous Dogs Exemption Schemes (England and Wales) Order 2015 sets out that the relevant Chief Officer of Police must be satisfied about the dog's temperament, and suitability of its owner, for it to be placed on the interim exemption scheme. As part of this, the relevant Chief Officer of Police must also be satisfied that the dog has been neutered, microchipped and has a third-party insurance policy in place before it can be released back to the owner whilst the Court case is waiting to be heard. In some cases, the dog will have to be kept in kennels, which are required to meet set welfare standards.

With regards to rehoming exempted dogs, current legislation only permits transfer of keepership of prohibited dogs where the existing keeper has died or is seriously ill. However, case law has confirmed that a person with a pre-existing relationship with the dog may apply to place it on the Index, even if they are not the owner or most recent keeper.

We recognise that improvements could be made to the existing legal framework for dog control. In December 2021, Defra published research in collaboration with Middlesex University, investigating measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible dog ownership across all breeds of dog.

The report found that improvements can be made to reduce the risk of attacks, particularly around early intervention. The report also made recommendations relating to consistency in enforcement practice, the quality of dog training and dog awareness courses, improved knowledge and awareness of appropriate behaviour around dogs and improved data recording and collection.

In response to this research, Defra established a Responsible Dog Ownership working group involving police, local authorities and animal welfare organisations. This is actively developing reforms in relation to each of the four main strands of the Middlesex report. These should address all aspects of tackling irresponsible dog ownership effectively, from prevention to robust, consistent enforcement, focussing on owners as well as on their dogs. Conclusions and policy reform recommendations are expected later this year.

Yours sincerely,



**THE RT HON LORD BENYON**